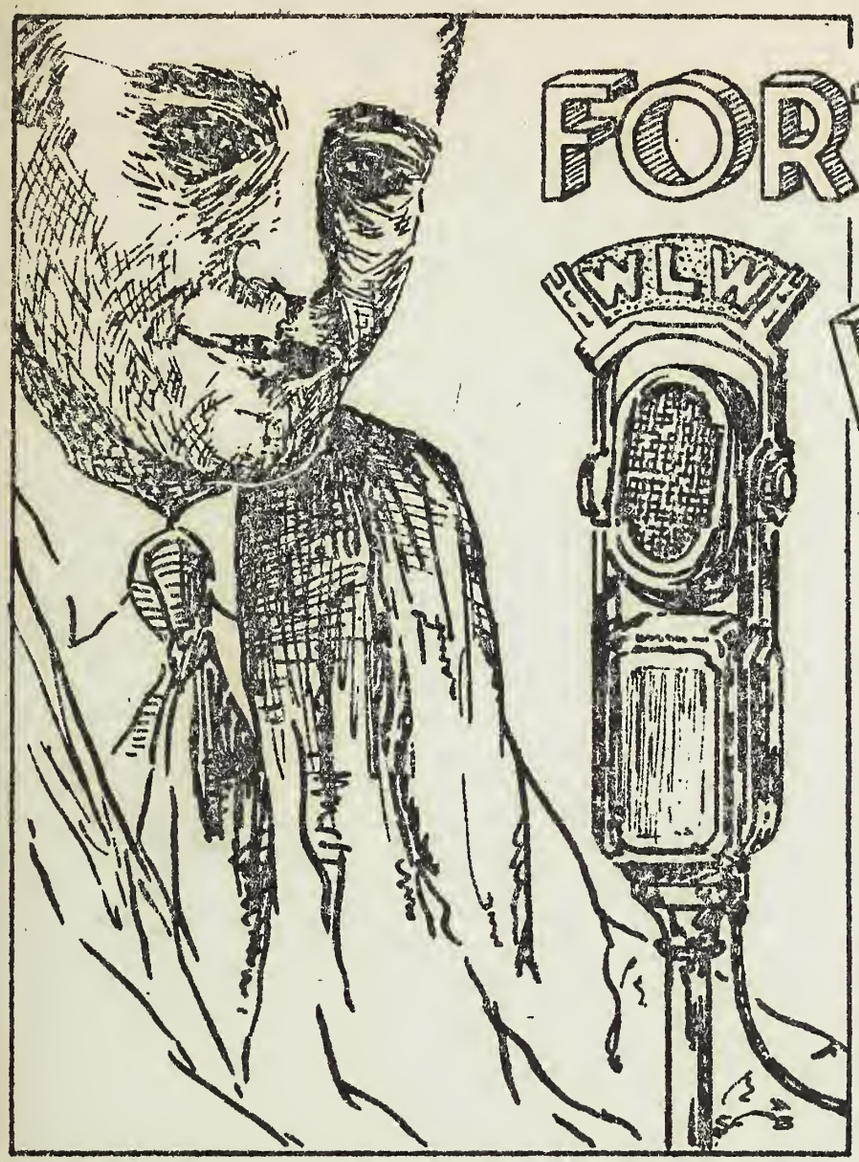

FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

A Series of Dramatizations of Better Land Use

No. 149 March 1, 1941 1:15 p.m.

"The Popcorn King"

W·L·W CINCINNATI

United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
Dayton · Ohio

SOUND: Whistling wind...

VOICE

Black blizzards across the plains.

SOUND OFF MIKE: Woman coughing...

SECOND VOICE

Biting wind!

DEEP VOICE

Choking dust.

SOUND: Up wind, set fire...

VOICE

Havoc...

SECOND VOICE

Destruction...

DEEP VOICE

Waste...

SOUND: Up wind, kill fire, set flood...

VOICE

Floods rushing down the great valleys.

VOICES IN UNISON

Floods, drowning, killing, wasting...

SOUND: Up wind...

DEEP VOICE

The wealth of America washing and blowing away -- soil erosion!

SOUND: Clap of thunder...

ANNOUNCER

The Popcorn King: the 149th consecutive episode of Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER

ANNOUNCER

Thirteen Ohio counties were carved out of the Western Reserve of Connecticut, among them Huron. The county is a rectangle of three hundred thousand acres. It has no lakes nor considerable ponds, no high hills, rocky ravines nor ledges, no great rivers except the Vermillion and the Huron. But it has one distinction -- it is the eastern limit of the prairies. When early settlers poured into the Western Reserve there stretched on one side the giant oak, the spreading beach, the sturdy maple, the walnut, white and black, the stately shining trunks of the sycamore and ash. On the other side -- the savannah, the prairie.

ORGAN: HOME, SWEET HOME.

ANNOUNCER

This is the true story of one of the greatest farms in all Huron County, the true story of a family who fought against odds -- and won. It is the story of the Humphrey family, well-known throughout Ohio, and it is told by the farm manager....(fade).

NARRATOR

My name is Clay Stackhouse, and I want to tell you about the Humphrey family, as fine a group of folks as ever lived. The reason their farm is so productive today is because they learned how to handle it, and because they had courage. Long before you or I were born...

SOUND: Door opens and closes...

FATHER

Did you get that load of beech logs?

DUDLEY (PANTING AND RUBBING HIS HANDS)

Father, I couldn't.

FATHER

There's no such word as couldn't, Dudley.

DUDLEY

But it's impossible. The wind is stinging cold, and you ought to see the ox teams. Why, their breath is like live steam. And there's ice on Dave's muffler, where the moisture from his breath froze.

FATHER

I told you to get those logs.

DUDLEY

It's not so much the cold, father, but the logs are ice-coated and as slippery as polished glass. It'd be easier to handle a greased pig.

FATHER

I told you to fetch logs, not excuses. There is a way.

DUDLEY

Yes, father.

SOUND: Door opens and...

DUDLEY (calling off mike)

Come on Dave! We're going back after those logs.

SOUND: Door closes...PAUSE

DUDLEY

We got the logs, father.

FATHER

Fine, my boy. Now sit down and warm yourself.

DUDLEY

It's not so cold, once you get used to it.

FATHER

You're only a boy, Dudley, but you must learn to do a man's work. Times have changed since I came here from Connecticut in an ox cart. We're getting out of the pioneer stage, and you and Dave and Harlow must learn to run the farm, and the sawmill.

DUDLEY

Sure. We'll all be rich someday.

FATHER

We're not poor now. Why, this very log cabin that you were born in has five upstairs rooms. We've done well in the lumber business. I don't know exactly, but I imagine I'm worth around a hundred thousand dollars. But money isn't everything, my son. You must learn self respect. I hope you never tell a lie, or a nasty story, or refuse help to a neighbor in need.

ORGAN: HOME, SWEET HOME.

NARRATOR

But a tiny cloud appeared in the western horizon, too small a cloud to be noticed at that time. Humphrey, senior, was a generou big-hearted man. Some neighbors owned an oil-barrel factory. They came to him for help. He backed them. An explosion killed several men, and expensive damage suits followed. Then the cloud swelled to storm size...

SOUND: Door opens and closes softly...

DUDLEY

Father...how are you feeling?

FATHER (FAINTLY BUT BRAVELY)

Me? Why, I never...felt better in my life. But what are you doing home from college?

DUDLEY

I've quit Buchtel, father. Dave and Harlow and I talked it all over, and we decided that we'd better come home and help you run the sawmill and the farm.

FATHER

Well, maybe it's for the best. This recent panic has shaken every business house in the land, and we're feeling the effects.

DUDLEY

I hear you had to sell part of the farm.

FATHER

Four hundred acres, and the rest of the place is mortgaged.

DUDLEY

Too bad.

FATHER

The mill is going deeper and deeper in debt. But I'm not licked, Dudley. Somehow, there is a way. There...is...a....way...(FADE).

ORGAN: SAD MUSIC BEHIND...

NARRATOR

Then Mr. Humphrey died, a brave soul worn out with work and worry. That left the boys alone. Then the mill burned. Farm prices went down. Twenty thousand bushels of potatoes that they had almost sweat blood over were left to rot in the field -- no market. The best hay crop in years sold for half its cost. Wet weather ruined 100 acres of beans.

DUDLEY

We might as well start packing, dear.

WIFE

Are we really finished?

DUDLEY

It's come at last. The banker has put the farm up for a sheriff's sale, and you know what that means. He'll be the one that will buy it.

WIFE

But what will we do?

DUDLEY

I reckon we can go to the city and I can get a job.

WIFE

But Dudley...you're 40 years old. You've never worked for anybody but yourself. You're too old to begin working for another now.

DUDLEY

But I must do something at once. I've got a family to feed.

WIFE

I'll do all I can to help, you know that. Maybe we can take in boarders in the city...(FADE).

ORGAN: SOFT MUSIC BEHIND...

NARRATOR

So this tall, lean, roughly clad man whose head was already frost with white plodded along the narrow, mud-rutted Ohio road that led to Wakeman. His steps lagged. Everything from his battered felt felt hat to his worn shoes spelled dejection and defeat. He was 40 years old -- jobless and peniless.

SOUND: Occasional dinner dishes rattling...

WIFE

Supper will be ready in a moment, dear. Any luck?

DUDLEY

The same old story. Nothing today.

WIFE

Don't admit you're beaten. There must be some way.

DUDLEY

Yes...there must be someway. I remember what my father told me, a long time ago. There is a way.

WIFE

There is a way, Dudley.

DUDLEY

You know, I've got an idea. Today I saw a man selling popcorn, and it was so rotten that I just had to stop and talk to him. I told him about this popcorn popper that I've invented.

WIFE

Maybe you could sell some of those poppers.

DUDLEY

I ought to be able to. With this little wire in the lid, I can stir the corn without taking off the lid, and...but no, no one seems to want to buy them. But....we can pop our own corn! Just like we did on the farm! We'll show these folks in Cleveland what real popcorn is. There is a way!

SOUND: Carnival noises...

VOICE

Two sacks, please.

DUDLEY

Yes, sir! Thank you.

SOUND: Coin tossed in box of coins...Occasional coins thru...

WIFE

Here, little girl. Don't spill it now!

DUDLEY

Thank you!

WIFE

Oh, it seems too good to be true.

DUDLEY

It just shows you that people appreciate good popcorn. Why, we'r making more money than Dave and Harlow.

WIFE

Oh, those ponies they bought! Why, they're so slow they can't keep ahead of their own dust.

DUDLEY

If business keeps up like this, we're going to have to put in another popcorn stand.

WIFE

Here you are!

DUDLEY

Thank you!

WIFE

Thank you!

ORGAN: MONTAGE THRU FOLLOWING...

DUDLEY

Put up a new stand!

WIFE

Several stands...

DUDLEY

Buy a delivery wagon...

WIFE

More stands...

DUDLEY

Stores...

WIFE

Chains of stores! Popcorn...better popcorn...

DUDLEY

There is a way!

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

SOUND: Rustling of paper...

DUDLEY

Hey, what's this?

WIFE

What's what?

DUDLEY

Euclid Beach Park has been foreclosed. Shut down.

WIFE

I'm not surprised. The rowdy crowd that came there, just to drink and see side shows...no decent entertainment.

DUDLEY

But it can be bought for a song!

WIFE

Who'd want it?

DUDLEY

We've got some money saved up...so much that I'm almost tempted to try to buy back the farm.

WIFE

That's always been your goal...our goal.

DUDLEY

But we haven't got enough yet. Now, I'd like to buy that park, and put in a clean place. Keep out the rowdies, and cater to the best people. I want to prove that decency will pay. We'll get that farm back someday, and when we do, I'm going over to father's grave, and thank him for the time he told me, "I sent you to fetch logs, not excuses. There is a way.

ORGAN: HOME, SWEET HOME.

NARRATOR

Well, you can guess the rest. In 1927, Dudley Humphrey did buy back the old homestead -- bought it back from the son of the man who had foreclosed. You can imagine the joy in his heart, his eyes brimming with tears, but his head erect as he drove back to the old farm -- his farm, to have and to hold. He had found, like many another, that there is a way.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

That is the true story of the Humphrey farm, of Huron County, Ohio. And now, once again we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is Ewing Jones.

JONES

And that story is almost unbelievable -- a story of riches to rags and back to riches again, all through determination and careful planning.

ANNOUNCER

But what's the condition of the farm today, Ewing? What I'm getting at, is it productive, or is it bothered with soil erosion as so many farms are?

JONES

John, it's one of the best farms that I've ever seen anywhere. When Mr. Humphrey came back to the farm, he realized right away that it couldn't be handled as it had been forty years before. So he secured Clay Stackhouse as farm manager, and together they worked out an excellent plan.

For example, Mr. Stackhouse saw at once that it needed tiling. There was none at the time, but today every acre is tiled. You see, they grow popcorn --

ANNOUNCER

....I might have guessed that.

JONES

Something like 200 acres each year. Popcorn, as Mr. Stackhouse pointed out, needs fertile, well-drained soils. Like field corn, it shouldn't be grown year after year on the same land. Usually it is preceded by clover and followed by small grain.

Then there was the soil erosion problem. Too many farmers believe that soil erosion isn't worth worrying about on gently rolling land, but Mr. Stackhouse knew that sheet erosion was something that had to be controlled, so he's taking adequate measures to preserve even the most gentle slopes. As to results, in addition to popcorn, seed oats, and seed wheat, the farm raises potatoes. It is the only one in Huron County that has made the 400-bushel potato club. It has raised as high as 600 bushels per acre. In all, the farm is a splendid tribute to Dudley Humphrey, a man with courage, and Clay Stackhouse, a man who knows the value of conservation farming.

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER.

JONES (on cue)

This is Ewing Jones, speaking for the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture. Goodbye, John, and goodbye farm friends, until next week at this same time, when once again we bring you a story of "Fortunes Washed Away."

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

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